

## Debating small-scale fisheries

**The 25th Session of the Committee on Fisheries, held in Rome from 24 to 28 February 2003, sought to focus on small-scale fisheries**

The 25th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) was held from 24 to 28 February 2003 at Rome. Delegates from over 100 Members of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), as well as observers from the UN, UN bodies and specialized agencies, regional fishery bodies, other international organizations, and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended.

The item on 'Strategies for Increasing the Sustainable Contribution of Small-Scale Fisheries to Food Security and Poverty Alleviation' was appearing on the agenda of COFI after 20 years. The agenda paper for this item (COFI/2003/9) highlighted the contribution of small-scale capture fisheries to food security and poverty alleviation, summarized the main issues that continue to constrain the sector, and outlined strategies that would go towards increasing this contribution. Actions proposed for support by the committee were as follows:

- gaining a better understanding of the nature, extent, and causes of vulnerability and poverty in small-scale fisheries, and improving information on, and indicators for, monitoring the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and poverty alleviation;
- improving cross-sectoral and inter-agency collaboration, and developing effective strategies and policies to address poverty and food security issues, and, where appropriate, including small-scale fisheries in national poverty-reduction strategies and policies;
- better management through the allocation of secure fishing rights—backed by appropriate legislation—to small-scale fishers in coastal and inland zones, and their effective protection from industrial fishing activity or activities that degrade aquatic resources and habitats;
- implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and development of technical guidelines on increasing the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and poverty alleviation; and, lastly,
- encouraging the formation of fishermen's organizations at community level and the facilitation of their representation at local, regional and national levels, thereby creating a sense of ownership and accountability by the small-scale stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Many delegations welcomed the focus on small-scale fisheries and complimented the FAO on the quality of the paper prepared. Several States expressed the need for greater support to small-scale fisheries, given the scale of employment and income it provides, and its role in food security, and endorsed the actions suggested to the committee.

### First time

At the start of the session, NGOs were asked by the Chair to present the report of a meeting held earlier with the FAO Secretariat on this Agenda Item. Relevant portions of the statement (see page 36), supported by several NGOs represented at COFI, were read out.

In the discussion that followed, Brazil said that it fully supported the NGO statement. The delegate went on to describe the steps being taken by Brazil to support small-scale fisheries and aquaculture. The emphasis, it was said, was on issues of equity and on eliminating hunger. It was further emphasized that the concept of responsible fisheries meant as well the need to guarantee that fishing activities contributed to the well-being of the people.

Venezuela pointed to the great importance given to protecting small-scale fishworkers, reflected in Article 305 of its Constitution, which states: "The State will protect the settlements and communities of artisanal fishermen and fisherwomen, as well as their inland fishing areas and those near to the coastline (as) defined in the law." This constitutional provision, it was noted, has led to an improvement in the standard of living of fishing communities.

While highlighting the importance of small-scale fisheries, El Salvador spoke of the need to provide a legislative basis favouring the participation of artisanal fishworkers in management. El Salvador also emphasized the importance of capacity building in the artisanal fisheries sector. The increase in influx of people from other sectors, including farming, into the fisheries, despite the risky nature of the sector, was highlighted, as was the need to explore alternative employment possibilities.

Burkina Faso stressed the need to pay more attention to small-scale fisheries, and especially to the role of women in the sector. The importance of strengthening organizations at the level of fishing communities was also emphasized.

Tanzania pointed out that 90 per cent of its production was from the small-scale sector. Benin said that small-scale fisheries provide employment to over 300,000 people and the sector is of high priority to the government.

The positive contribution made by the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (SFLP) to the fisheries sector

in the sub-Saharan region, and the need to expand the programme to cover the rest of Africa, was highlighted. Angola requested the FAO to undertake more programmes in support of small-scale fisheries.

Peru spoke of the importance of small-scale fisheries, especially its contribution to domestic fish supplies, and said that the Permanent South Pacific Commission (CPPS) had set up a working group on small-scale fisheries.

India said that the approximately 6 mn fishermen in the country made substantial contributions to employment, income and food security. There was a need to support the small-scale sector, given the increasing levels of poverty and vulnerability in the sector. India extended support to all the action points in the FAO document.

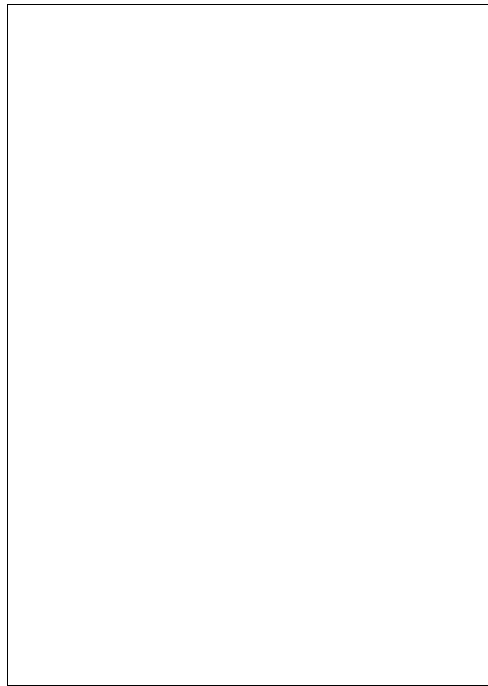
Cuba proposed that small-scale fisheries should regularly be on the agenda of COFI and called on the FAO to provide assistance in the management of small-scale fisheries.

Norway called for a greater focus on small-scale fisheries from donors and NGOs. It was emphasized that the FAO Code of Conduct provided the framework to support the sector. Norway's commitment to support research on small-scale fisheries, a priority area identified by the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Research (ACFR), was highlighted. Attention was also drawn to the FAO/Norway study being undertaken to understand the links between fish trade and food security.

Canada stressed the negative impact of land-based sources of pollution on small-scale fisheries and pointed out that declining inshore resources had pushed fishermen to go farther out into the sea, which had implications for their safety. It was also pointed out that the greater vulnerability of the subsector was partly linked to its high foreign exchange requirements.

#### **Small-scale sector**

Chile emphasized the high priority given to supporting its small-scale sector, which employs approximately 40,000 fishers. In Chile, the 5-mile inshore zone is



exclusively reserved for artisanal fisheries.

**I**n addition, fishing communities have been given rights over specified management areas. The need for striking the right balance between allocation of resources to the artisanal and industrial sector, was emphasized. The point was made that, with the right support, artisanal fisheries need not be characterized by poverty. Chile called on the FAO to provide greater support to small-scale fisheries and its management.

St. Lucia spoke of the importance of fisheries for its people, pointing, however, to the negative impact on its small-scale fishermen of the listing of species under CITES. It called for a greater role for the FAO on CITES-related issues.

Philippines mentioned its Fisheries Code of 1998, by which the zone reserved exclusively for artisanal fisheries was extended from 7 to 15 km. This Code also provided for the setting up of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Committees (FARMCS) for participatory resources management.

The European Union (EU) spoke of its commitment to small-scale fisheries, and its support to the sector in several parts of the developing world. Endorsing the proposed strategy, the EU called for more support to small-scale fisheries and an

improved understanding of poverty in the sector.

Belize said that even as conservation agencies were encouraging a shift to tourism from fisheries as a source of income and employment, the decline in tourism in the recent past had exposed the vulnerability of communities depending on tourism. Belize also pointed out that, despite the increase in coastal aquaculture, it was not the poor who were reaping the benefits. The US spoke of the "White Water to Blue Water" Project it was supporting in the Caribbean, using a cross-sectoral approach to ecosystem management, beginning with the upstream sectors and extending through the wetlands, mangrove swamps and coral reefs into the ocean.

The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) highlighted the need for a clear definition of what constitutes small-scale fisheries, given the heterogeneity that characterizes the sector. It cautioned against the trend of small-scale fleets fishing farther out into the seas, pushing their technological limits, as this compromised the safety of these fleets.

There was unequivocal endorsement by most countries of the need for greater support by FAO to small-scale fisheries. Support, it was said, should go, among other things, towards better management of resources, formulation and implementation of approaches for participatory resources management, reduction of post-harvest losses, safety at sea and building capacity of fishworker organizations. It is to be hoped that this will translate into effective national policies in support of small-scale fisheries and more FAO programmes directed at the sector.

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